

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o XCII.]

Saturday, Nov. 4. 1786.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

S I R,

A Correspondent of yours has described the uneasiness he feels from a wife of a romantic turn of mind. It is my misfortune to be yoked to a husband who would have pleased that Lady to a T, but who is a perpetual distress to me; who teases me from morning to night with what he calls sentiment; and talks for ever of something which he terms fineness of mind.

I am the daughter of a gentleman of moderate fortune in the south of Scotland, who, early in life, married a Lady who brought him no fortune indeed, but soon enriched him with four sons and five daughters, of whom I am the eldest. By the assistance of a great man, whose interest in the county my father had espoused, my brothers were soon shipped off to India, and some other far-off places, to shift for themselves, and push their fortune as they best could. It was more difficult to dispose of us. My mother proposed to breed some of us to business, to put us in a way, as she said, of earning an honest livelihood for ourselves. The pride of my father could not submit to this proposition, and he thought it better that we should starve like gentlewomen descended from an ancient family.

We were accordingly kept at home in the old and crazy mansion-house, where we received such an education as my mother, assisted by our parish-minister, (who happened to be a relation of hers), could give us. As to my father, he was so much occupied in managing his farm, and in labouring to make the two ends of the year meet, that he had little leisure to bestow any attention upon us. If at any time he addressed himself to me and my sisters, it was to check any thing that appeared to him like extravagance in our dress, to recommend economy and attention to household-affairs, and to praise those happy times when men were not scared from marriage by the extravagance of wives; and when, of course, every daughter of a respectable family was sure of a good husband as soon as she was brought from the nursery.

A continual flow of animal spirits, and a chearful disposition, enabled me to support this life, without feeling much uneasiness, or much desire to change my situation. When I had entered my twentieth year, a female relation of my father's, who resides chiefly in town, honoured us with a visit. She was pleased to express much satisfaction with my looks and appearance, blamed my father for not sending me to town; and said, that were I once properly introduced into the world, I might be certain of a good marriage. These

observations were accompanied with a warm invitation to pass the next winter at her house, where she told my father it would cost him nothing but a mere trifle for my cloaths, and that he might think himself very happy to be able to dispose of a daughter at so easy a rate.

These arguments at length prevailed, and it was agreed that I should attend my cousin to town. I will fairly own, Sir, that I felt a certain degree of uneasiness at the thoughts of being exposed, as it were, to sale, and condemned to give my hand to the highest bidder. My parents, it was plain, sent me to town with no other view than that I might find a husband there; and when I took leave of them, I could easily see they laid their account that I was not to return without one.

These reflections were soon lost amidst the gaiety and hurry of a town-life; I enjoyed its pleasures and amusements without thinking of consequences; and would have forgotten the object of my journey, had not my prudent kinswoman recalled my attention to it from time to time, and inculcated, in terms sufficiently strong, the absolute necessity of changing my state.

Meanwhile the season passed away; and though I met with a sufficient degree of attention at all public places, and though my cousin spared no pains to set me off to the best advantage, nothing like a serious proposal of marriage ever was made.

Such was the natural lightness of my spirit, and easiness of my disposition, that, without much difficulty, I reconciled myself to the idea of returning to my father's; and nothing gave me any disquietude, but the thoughts of continuing a burden on him. But the solicitude of my cousin, who had in a manner undertaken to dispose of me, increased daily, and afforded me, I must confess, rather amusement than uneasiness. When she saw me led out to dance by a younger brother, she could not conceal her chagrin; and from her manner and conversation, a person unacquainted with her motive might have been led to think, that there was something baneful in the touch of a man who did not possess a certain fortune.

While matters wore this unpromising aspect, and the period fixed for my return to the country approached, we went with a party to the theatre, to see the celebrated Mrs Siddons play in the tragedy of *The Gamester*. The distress of Mrs Beverly soon engaged my attention so completely, that it was some time before I observed, that, by an accidental change of places in the box, a gentleman somewhat advanced in life, and whom I had never seen before, was placed by me. He seemed deeply affected by the play; and after it was over, addressed to me some observations on the piece and the performers. He appeared to be pleased with a remark or two which I happened to make on the play, praised the feeling I had shown during its representation, and then entered more deeply into the subject of plays and of feelings. I cannot say that I understood all he said; but either he did not perceive my ignorance, or kindly wished to instruct me; and so continued talking till it was time to retire.

When we got home, my cousin observed, that I had been well placed that evening. "Mr *Edwards*," said she, "is not one of those young, giddy, extravagant fops whom one generally meets with
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" at public places. He has lately succeeded to a large fortune by the death of an elder brother, and the world say he is looking out for a wife. He is just the sort of man I should wish for you, and I have engaged him to dinner on Monday next; so I desire you may be at home."

The imagination of my good kinswoman dwelt constantly on Mr Edwards, whom she seemed to consider as my last stake, and many a good advice I received as to my conduct and behaviour on this important Sunday. " Mr Edwards," said she, " is a sedate, sensible man; you must not therefore talk at random, and laugh as you sometimes do. You must, above all, be attentive to him, and do not engage in any idle talk with the rest of the company." When the day came, my cousin attended my toilet in person; and, had I been going to a birth-day ball, could not have bestowed more pains than she did in dressing me out in the manner that appeared to her most likely to make an impression on the devoted Mr Edwards.

You may well believe that I was much entertained with this anxiety to please a person I had seen but once, and who I could not suppose had ever bestowed one thought on me. When the company assembled, I found that, in the selection she had made, my cousin had done me ample justice. The females were either old or uncommonly plain in their appearance. By some manoeuvre I was placed next to Mr Edwards at dinner; but there, the ridicule of my own situation, added to my natural flow of spirits, and forgetting all the prudent advices I had received, I yielded without reserve to the disposition of the moment, and was highly amused with the looks I from time to time received from the head of the table, which, though unobserved by the rest of the company, were to me sufficiently intelligible.

My artless unpremeditated manner was however more successful than my cousin expected, as I could foresee Mr Edwards repeated his visits, and after some time offered me his hand in the most respectful and delicate manner. In marrying Mr Edwards I did no violence to my own inclinations. Though I cannot say that I loved him, I esteemed his character; I was grateful for the distinctions with which he had honoured me, and I was firmly determined to discharge all the duties of a wife.

Soon after our marriage, he carried me on an excursion to England; and as he wished, he said, to enjoy my conversation without interruption, we travelled alone. For the first day or two I endeavoured to amuse him as I best could, by talking of the face of the country, the towns through which we passed, the gentlemen's seats we saw, and such like common topics. One day, however, he at once struck me dumb, by asking whether I was most pleased with *Marivaux* or *Riccoboni*? I was at length obliged to confess, that I did not know the meaning of his question. " Gracious Heavens," exclaimed he, " have you never, *Matilda*, (for so he always calls me, though I have told him a thousand times that I was christened " *Martha*) perused the delightful pages of these celebrated authors?" In a word, Sir, had I told him that I had never read the scripture, he could not have testified more astonishment.

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Our jaunt was shortened, and we hurried into the country, that I might, without interruption, apply myself to the study of the French language, without which my husband plainly insinuated that I could never be a companion for a rational creature. To this I had no objection; and I resolved, by assiduous application, to make up for the deficiencies in my education. But this will not satisfy my husband, and I now plainly perceive, that were I as accomplished as any of my sex, it would not mend the matter one bit. If I happen to be in good humour when he is in a grave fit, (which, to say the truth, he frequently is), he ascribes it to want of attachment, and tells me, that if I felt that sympathy of soul, in which true happiness consists, I could not behave in that manner. If I receive my friends and neighbours with common attention, he says, that if I loved like him, I could not dedicate so much of my time to the gratification of others. If I quit him to look after my household-concerns, he talks of vulgar cares and unfeeling solitudes; though, at the same time, with all his sentiment and refinement, he is by no means indifferent to the pleasures of the table; and it was but yesterday that he was out of humour the whole day, because the mutton was over-roasted, and the cook had put too much garlick into an omelet.

Under favour, Sir, I have been sometimes led to suspect, that the unhappiness of my husband proceeds from a certain degree of selfishness, which he has not been at pains to restrain within due bounds. I would willingly, however, do every thing in my power to remove his uneasiness, but find myself altogether at a loss how to act. His distresses are so various, and often of so peculiar a nature, that when I exert myself the most to please him, I frequently give him the greatest pain. In this hard situation I at length resolved to apply to you for advice and assistance; which will much oblige,

Your constant reader,

MARTHA EDWARDS.

ALL this comes of not marrying a younger man. Had Miss Martha (or Matilda, since her husband will have it so) wedded one of the young gentlemen of the present mode, she would have found him perfectly indifferent as to what feelings she possessed, or what authors she read; but he would probably have asked some preliminary questions about her fortune, which Mr Edwards seems to have overlooked. As to the niceties of the table, that is a feeling common to both schools, in which the new indeed rather surpasses the old: that study therefore I would recommend to Mrs Edwards. The codes of "sentiment and fineness of mind" are so voluminous, that I know not how to desire her to undergo a course of them; but it will not be difficult for her to make herself mistress of *Hannab Glasse*.

E D I N B U R G H :

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